

## DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

### Jacob's Acceptance of The LORD's Rulership and Protection

A question from Ben Motola about to whom and why Jacob promises to tithe whatever he had begotten after his travels to Haran has made me reexamine more closely the details of the story at the opening of Vayetse. After his return to the Land in next week's Parashah, Jacob first sets up an altar in Shechem. Later Jacob does indeed set up an altar/stone in Beth-El in fulfillment of his promise to God, but still there the text says nothing about Jacob's offering tithes, although he makes a wine and oil dedication on the altar. Furthermore, there are not yet Kohanim to give tithes for God! Abraham gives tithes to Melchizedek, but there is no one like that here. If to anything, Jacob's promise of tithes must refer to those which the Children of Israel will be obligated in the distant future. This might make sense in the context of what precedes it, which is the promise that the stone pillar would become a "House of God." For although Jacob does set up an altar, no built-up sanctuary to the God of Israel existed, not at Beth-El nor elsewhere, until the future. Hence Jacob would seem to be promising tithes for a future time after a sanctuary (or sanctuaries) are established, when Israel has a fully settled lifestyle in the Land. But why mention such future tithes here? If they are connected to the building of a sanctuary, well, sacrifices are also part of worship in a sanctuary, but Jacob doesn't say here he will offer a sacrifice. Of course, sacrifices only require an altar in an open courtyard, not a "House" per se.

I answered Ben's question by saying that "tithes" or other fractions of produce are usually a form of "taxation," and paying "taxes" is recognizing an obligation to a government, authority or over-lordship of some kind. Joseph arranges for Pharaoh to get a "fifth" of the produce in return for protection of Egypt and watching out for the Egyptians' welfare. Even the "cut" one agrees to give as an offering to a gang or mobster is a recognition of an obligation to a controlling, governing organization. And what does one get when one agrees to give a steady "cut" to a mobster? Well, obviously, "protection;" it's "protection money." One agrees to pay steady taxes to a controlling governmental power in return for that authoritative power's protection. And it is precisely God's *protection* which is being promised to Jacob here, a protection and vigilance over Jacob on his journey, during the time he is in Syria, and protection to bring Jacob back home to the Land. God promises not to leave Jacob and watch over him throughout until he returns to safety. Hence in return, Jacob pledges fealty to God's governing authority. This LORD who gives Jacob protection will be his Governing Ruler. And Jacob will recognize that Authority by paying this fixed cut of taxes to his Ruler.

But why even mention a built House of God, a Sanctuary? And furthermore, the Torah's "tithes" are given to the Temple and the Levites and Priests, or to the poor, or for ritual celebrations. They aren't a real "government" per se, or are they? After all, when King Solomon and successor Kings start imposing fixed governmental taxation, this is opposed! This is precisely the issue we have been touching upon in our current study of the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel may be pointing ahead to Ezra and the Hasmoneans, when the Priests become in fact the temporal rulers, in order to get away from the "double taxation" system of taxes owed to God and His Temple and Priests, as well as taxes demanded (often implied to be unfairly usurped through procedures like "eminent domain") by the temporal ruler. Of course, in Babylonia and in many ancient city-states (like King Melchizedek who is also a "priest" in Salem) the temporal governance is identified intimately with the state cult. In contradistinction, Israel recognizes Divine Authority as separate from temporal authority, but both are entitled to taxes and recognized as governance. So, yes, the tithe Jacob offers is a tax owed God as Israel's Sovereign Authority. It must wait to be paid until such future time as Israel constitutes a polity in the Land which needs a government. And what of the promise to build a "House of God?" That too is connected to the establishment of God as Monarch. A King must have a Palace. A Dynast must establish a House. David must build a House of Cedars, but God as Monarch must have a Palace too (II Samuel 7:2). In return for God's Governance and Protection, Jacob here accepts the LORD as Israel's future Divine Monarch and Royal House, and promises a regular "cut" of taxation in obeisance to that Divine Authority.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Vayetse

December 6-7, 2024 | 6 Kislev, 5785

### SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 106 | Haftarah: p. 135 / Kaplan: p. 130 | Haftarah: p. 1430

**Reminder:** Due to *Year of Hope* carpet renovations, on every Shabbat through the end of the year, Services will be held in the **Levy Auditorium**, and Kiddush will be held in the **Elias Room**. There is no access to the Main Sanctuary.

**Candle Lighting** | 4:11 pm

**Evening Services** | 4:15 pm | Levy Auditorium

**Friday Night Lights** | Rabbi Soloveichik | after services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family*

**Zemiroth** | 8:15 am | Levy Auditorium

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Levy Auditorium

**Tot Shabbat** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

**Youth Groups & Junior Congregation** | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

**Kiddush** | following services | Elias Room | *Kiddush liquor sponsored by Liliane Marks, in memory of her mother, Josephine Saada Daban*

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

**Teen Shiur** | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

**Evening Services** | 4:05 pm

**Habdala** | 4:55 pm

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings

Sun | 8:05 am / Mon-Friday | 7:05 am

#### Evenings

**Sunday (Minha & Arbit)** | 4:15 pm / Monday-Thursday (Arbit Only) | 6:30 pm

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | www.shearithisrael.org

## COMING UP

*If registration required, sign up at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*

---

### From the Emergency Rooms of Soroka:

#### A Story of Survival, Resilience & Medical Innovation

**THIS Thursday, Dec 12 | 7:00 pm (following 6:30 pm Evening Services)**

*Free registration required | With a wine and cheese reception*

Soroka Medical Center, one of Israel's premier medical care and research facilities, is located in Southern Israel, and was a first responder hospital most directly affected by October 7th. Dr. Uri Greenbaum will discuss the war and Soroka's response, his experiences treating cancer patients during wartime, as well as speak about new innovation in his work in the field of hematology.

---

### Special Shabbat Morning Shiur with Rabbi Soloveichik

**NEXT Shabbat, December 14**

#### Following Shabbat Morning Services

At the conclusion of morning services, instead of a formal sermon or lecture, Rabbi Soloveichik will give a lively 30-minute class followed by kiddush. Sponsors welcome!

---

### Scholar-In-Residence: Raizi Chechik

**Shabbat Vayesheb, December 20-21**

Raizi Chechik, a Judaics scholar and dynamic sought-after speaker, will address the congregation with two timely talks:

*Friday Night Lights, Pre-Hanukkah Edition:*

Chanukah Lights: Joseph's Journey to Leadership

*Shabbat Lecture, following morning services:*

Of Life and Legacy: Cultivating Spirituality in our Children and Grandchildren (And Ourselves!)

Ms. Chechik, an innovative and inspiring teacher of Jewish texts, serves as the Community Scholar at the Jewish Center of Manhattan and has been an invited guest scholar at over 100 institutions and communities around the world. She is a Fellow at the Center for Israel Studies at YU, where she is completing doctoral work in Jewish History, and mentors Heads of School worldwide on behalf of the Israel Ministry of Diaspora Affairs.

To sponsor these talks or kiddush in honor of our guest, visit  
**[shearithisrael.org/raizi-chechik](http://shearithisrael.org/raizi-chechik)**.

## COMING UP

*If registration required, sign up at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*

---

### Parent-Child Learning

**On Select Saturday Nights | 1 hour after Habdala**

**Next session: December 14, with Rabbi Soloveichik | 6:00 pm**

January 4 | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Ira Rohde

February 8 | 7:00 pm | Dr. Pasha Kletenek, Head of School, MDS

March 8 | 7:30 pm | Ellin Cooper, Yoetzet Halakha

---

**DEADLINE: This Saturday night, December 7**

### Sisterhood Jewelry-Making Workshop

**Sunday, December 15 | 4:00 pm | \$25 per person |**

Ofra Lerner of Ofra Jewels will help us make beautiful jewelry with real pearls, semi-precious stones, crystals, and charms. Create a Hanukkah gift for yourself or a loved one!

---

### (Virtual) Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

*All proceeds will be donated to help families of Israeli soldiers*

**Single film: \$10.00 | All films: \$21.00**

**Film Discussions: Sundays | 4:00 pm | on Zoom**

**December 22 | Time of Favor (2000)**

**January 26 | Walk on Water (2004)**

*A link is sent to registrants to watch the film a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom.*

---

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

---

Mazal tob to **Julia Lustig**, upon her marriage to Jacob Ungar. Congratulations as well to her parents, **Rachel Brody & Michael Lustig (Segan)** and the entire Lustig family.

We mourn the loss of our longtime member, **Dr. Roberto Levi**.  
Condolences to his son, **Alexander (& Amanda) Levi**.

---

**Thank you** to the 250 of you who volunteered for this year's **Pack-a-thon**, including our partners at the **Jewish Center** and **West End Church**. Extra loud shout out to our friends at the **Church of the Latter-day Saints**, who, in addition to a substantial financial contribution, sent volunteers on Ereb Thanksgiving to help with the major set-up and on Friday to help load the truck, and 135 committed volunteers for the Pack-a-thon itself. We simply could not have achieved this ambitious *besed* project without them. And of course, thank you to **Masbia** for coordinating and distributing close to 2,000 packages to struggling New Yorkers!

See press coverage of the Pack-A-Thon at **[shearithisrael.org/press](http://shearithisrael.org/press)**.